

# The Athenian Mercury.

Saturday, June 1. 1695.

Quest. 1. **W**Hat are we to think of the Love of Socrates and Alcibiades; whether was it criminal, or innocent?

*Ans.* We would very unwillingly injure the fame of so great a man, since we esteem it a greater crime in some sense to misrepresent the *Dead*, who can't speak for themselves, then the *Living*, who are able to make their own defence: We must acknowledge many of the ancients have clear'd him, and among the moderns, on the summing up the whole Evidence *pro* and *con*, the learned Mr. Edwards seems inclin'd to the same favourable opinion. Thothis, he acknowledges, against the Testimony of many very grave authors, *Plutarch*, *Minutius Felix*, *Tertullian*, and others: As for *Plutarch*, we think he's mistaken, for he seems rather to clear him in his *Alcibiades*, where he says expressly, that "tho others made their Court to him for his extraordinary Beauty, that affection which *Socrates* bore him was only for the Beauty of his Soul, and the effect of his Virtue and good Disposition, and that fearing least his Flatterers might corrupt him, he interpos'd to preserve him from Ruine. And yet more positively a little lower! *Alcibiades*, says he, observ'd that his Discourses aim'd not at any effeminate pleasures, nor sought any thing criminal, or dishonest, but rather laid open to him the Imperfections of his own mind, his Pride and Vanity, &c. And his Discourses on this head, had, it seems, such power over him, as sometimes to draw even Tears from his Eyes, so that, (as *Cleanthes* says, in the same Author) he always gave *Socrates* his Ears, tho the rest to his Rivals. Indeed their Friendship began when he was very young, but it may seem to have been founded on principles of Gratitude and Virtues, for in a certain Skirmish the Athenians had with some of their neighbours, in the first Campaign that *Alcibiades* ever made, he having there receiv'd a wound, *Socrates* threw himself before him, cover'd him with his shield, and sav'd his Life; nor was that brave man long in his Debt, doing as much for him at *Delium*, and making good his Retreat when the Athenians were routed.

Yet after all, we can't deny but that the defence which *Maximus Tyrius* makes for him on this head, had been better let alone, for he seems to confess over much, and in many places the objection appears so much stronger then the answer, that we shoud have been more ready to have believ'd him innocent, had not this Philosopher taken so much pains to have prov'd him so. He has writ no less then 4 Dissertations on this subject, which he seems to have so great a fondness for, that it argues him a thorough Platonist: The sum of what he says, in their long Haranguing-way, is no more then this: "That 'twas a virtuous Love, not a criminal desire, *ἔρως*, not *ἐρωίς*." *ἔρως*, which his Client manifested towards *Alcibiades*, and other young persons, admiring the Beauty of the Creator, some sparks of the infinite Goodness, and Fairness which appear'd in them. An excuse which we are afraid will scarce pass currant with an ill natur'd world, any more then another which the same Philosopher makes for him in some of the same Dissertations; "that he was not the first who practis'd these things, having learnt it from *Aspasia*: and a very excellent Tutoress, if the same, as we suppose she was, with *Pericles* his mistress: But what he further owns concerning *Socrates*, makes matters look yet much worse, defending him by the examples

of *Sappha*, *Anacreon*, and others of the same reputation: But 'tis still less tolerable when he makes him mad with love of the generous *Alcibiades*, the handsome *Erisobulus*, the most witty *Agathe*, the divine *Pheidrus*, the beautiful *Charmides*, and half the City together; nay, introduces him himself, acknowledging, "that his heart used to beat when he saw *Charmides*, that he was stark mad and drunk at the sight of *Alcibiades*, that his Eyes dazzled at the approach of *Autolichus* and the like. Certainly here seems to be all the marks, all the disturbances and emotions of a criminal Love. Besides, it must be granted, as we remember, *Plutarch* somewhere observes in his Discourse of Love, that it looks desperately suspicious, that 'twas something more then the Beauty of the mind which these sage *Sophists* were so fond of, otherwise they might as well have sought and found it in deform'd bodies as in others, it may be sometimes sooner and in greater perfection, for even *Socrates* himself had, it seems, none of the most promising aspects, and yet is produc'd by those who admire the heathen morality, as 'tis said he was by the Devil long before; as the great pattern of wisdom and goodness.

Now if even his greatest Friends say this and worse of him, we doubt the world will easily believe what he's accus'd of by his Enemies; at least by those who were indifferent, who had no prejudice against him nor quarrel with him. It was not *Tertullian*, or *Minutius* who condemn'd him, but *Amyus* and *Melitus*, and yet the Fathers, tho they knew his Testimony was serviceable to 'em against the Heathen, do positively charge him with this worst of crimes. *Tertullian* says, "*Lego partem sententiae atticae, in Socratem, corruptorem adolescentiae pronuntiatam*." He speaks of it as a thing certain, notorious and recorded in History; nor will this seem at all strange to any who has but a true Idea of the Heathen world, which was infinitely more corrupt (we think we are able to prove it) then the Christians, as bad as we are, very few of their best men having been free from notorious vice, and most of 'em having been guilty of that abominable one which nature so much abhors; which was allow'd, nay recommended in most of their Commonwealths, nay we believe enjoy'd, by a positive Law among the *Eleans*, for no less seems imply'd in some passages of *Maximus Tyrius* already mention'd, a fearful instance of the Divine Justice and Vengeance, in suffering men who had once forsaken the true God, and rooted out the notions of piety towards him to run on to such excess of unnatural Villany; for whom the fate of *Sodom* would be too mild, much more that just punishment which the so often mention'd Author tells us, a great number of 'em inflicted on themselves in a certain City in Italy; who being disappointed of their Brutal desires, fell unanimously into a just despair, and hang'd themselves.

Quest. 2. Whether had the Heathens any notion of a future state, because I find some affirm, and others deny it?

*Ans.* Dark notions generally they had, and some weak glimmerings, but both they and even the Jews themselves, it must be confess'd, were much to seek in these matters, before Life and Immortality were brought to Light by the Gospel. This in general may be observ'd of the wisest men among the Heathens, that tho now and then they express themselves handsomely enough, and sometimes plainly and positively in these matters, yet they were always either *Sceptics* at the bottom, and doubting of all they as-



firm'd, or their knowledge was very limited, and they were ignorant of much more than they knew, tho' unsufferably arrogant and conceited of their inconsiderable scraps of knowledge, when compared with divine Revelation, and the clearer Light of the Christian Faith. And, thus, not to mention the *Epicureans*, whose minds are sufficiently known in these matters *Erigoras* and *Plato* himself, appear to have believed little more of the future estate of the Soul, than a perpetual *Metempsychosis*, at least a very long one: And *Plato's* great year, when all things shoud' revolve, and be renew'd, seems to have been nothing else but the Jewish tradition of the, *αὐτοκίνησις ἢ αὐτοκίνησις*, at the end of six thousand years, only he has given it a new turn and air that none might discover whence he had it; for whether we fix it at 36000, as 'tis usually taken, exclusively of the 7th great year, the sum is the same, being made up of 6 times 6, or if as others, 49000, 'tis but including the *Sabbatic* year; or if yet higher, and it be carry'd on, as 'tis in some computations, to 360000 three hundred and sixty thousand, 'tis evidently wrought up by the same way of computation.

But to leave these numeral niceties, and come to something more solid, *Socrates* himself, if his Scholar don't misrepresent him, in his discourse concerning a future life goes no further than an, *ἐὶ ἀνδρῶν*, &c.

"If these things be true: And 'tis notorious that *Tully* and *Seneca* and most of the greatest Heathen names advance no farther: And accordingly all *Cicilius* his *Declaratio* in *Minutius Felix*, is little more than *Scepticism*, and *Origen* proves his adversary to have hardly been advanc'd even so high as that painful and senseless opinion. But we can't forbear giving the Reader one passage out of *Xenophons* *ἡ περὶ αἰσῶν*: As 'tis quoted in *Mr. Edwards* his discourse on the *vain Philosophy* of the *Heathens*, where this subject is the best manag'd that we have any where seen it. We shall transcribe the most part of it because it not only shows us the doubtfulness of the wisest Heathens in this case, whether *Cyrus* himself, or *Xenophon* for him, it matters not, but has also an useful passage, or two on other subjects. 'Tis as follows, *Ὁὐ γὰρ δὲ αἰσῶν*, &c. "You ought

"not to think (says *Cyrus* to his Friends) you know certainly, that I shall be nothing after I cease to live here; for the Soul while 'tis in this mortal body, can scarce be said to live, tho' it gives life to the body; but then it properly lives when it leaves the body: then it acts, and is truly knowing and wise. The *Tortures* and *punishments* inflicted on *Murderers* by Souls thrust out of their bodies [the Fact it seems was not doubted of, that there then were apparitions of murder'd persons] and the honours and rewards of good and innocent minds, do prove that Souls still subsist. Nothing is more like Death than sleep, but even in sleep the Soul discovers its Divinity, and never more than at that time, for it hath a prospect of things to come, being then more free than ever [therefore *Xenophon* had more wit then to believe the Soul slept when the body did]. If these things be so, (he goes on) reverence my Soul when I am dead, and observe my commands; But if they are not so, yet reverence the Immortal Gods: And below, whether it shall be my Lot to be with God, or to be reduc'd to nothing. Much to the same purpose with our own old Gentleman's story of a long leap in the dark, which was all his truly vain Philosophy cou'd teach him.

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